

# Building on Student Achievement through Incentive Programs

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to determine if incentive programs like Renaissance impact high school students and faculty. Incentives can go a long way for students in schools. At Lehigh Senior High School (LSHS), for example, students were introduced to the Renaissance Program this school year, by receiving goodies. Coupons at Dairy Queen, discounts at local stores like Buffalo Wild Wings and free time from class to experience shows, plays, and pep rallies for their dedication and commitment to doing what it takes to be successful in high school.

At LSHS there are over 1,800 students, all of whom are on free and reduced lunch, with a large diverse population that includes Hispanics, African-Americans, Caucasians, Asian and Native Americans. The results indicate that LSHS has seen a difference in attitude with students and faculty, because they now feel like someone cares about them. Students Have written essays describing the impact Renaissance the program has had I their lives.

Renaissance at LSHS is meant to motivate students, staff and teachers. When we are acknowledged by our achievements we tend to do better, and at the end of the day it is the goal for each of us to grow and be the best version of ourselves, and having a little encouragement with incentive programs is an added bonus. The results show that the Renaissance program has helped recognized student's achievements through leadership, teamwork, character, and school spirit. However, the barriers to incentive programs are time, funding and developing new ideas to keep students and faculty interest.

Keywords: incentive, rewards, achievement, motivation, programs, Renaissance

**Full Text**

High School students seem to lack the motivation they need to stay in school and also be productive while they attend school(Legault, 2006). Students are late to class or just not attending school, grades begin to dip and in discipline records tend to increase. At LSHS an incentive program was implemented to help change the dynamics of the school culture and climate, by rewarding students who are committed to becoming leaders, team players, and having school spirit. “Jostens Renaissance is an acclaimed educational enrichment program that is customized by you and your school community. Jostens Renaissance empowers you and your school to make it matter by boosting GPAs, increasing attendance, improving school pride and growing graduation rates”(Jostens, 2015). As a current School Counselor at LSHS, I observe students struggle to maintain grades, making it to class in a timely manner and currently experiencing disciplinary action for simple things like dress code to more serious offenses such as fighting and drug uses. Incidents such as there happening everyday; teachers having to write referrals and students seeming to not care about their future. Seeing that something innovative and urgent had to occur Renaissance was implemented at LSHS for the 2015-2016 school year.

The objective of this program at the school is to promote academic excellence among students and teachers, increasing positive behavioral outcomes for students and increasing attendance among students. Students are also encouraged to develop their leadership capabilities, and to become good citizen through character development. Tem work is also encouraged and those who exhibit all these traits highlighted and celebrated. For any program to be successful at a school, it will need the support of the principal,

administrative staff, teachers, faculty, parents and students. Once administration was on board LSHS, Renaissance was introduced to the student population and teachers in October after the completion of their first quarter grades where reported.

Students received a color-coded Renaissance card based on the grade point average they received for their first quarter report card grades. However, only 900 of the 1,800 students currently enrolled at LSHS received a Renaissance card. The students that received their cards each quarter are allowed take in events at the school for free. For example, after students received their cards they were provided with an incentive to attend the schools first ever lip-sync battle (students vs. teachers) during the school day, a free pass from class. To everyone's surprise the teachers won, nonetheless students and teachers where excited about the rewards that came with receiving a Renaissance card. Students would get snow cones during lunch if they could show they earned a Renaissance card, coupons to stores and restaurants. Donuts and candy were also some of the other rewards that were introduced during the program at LSHS.

After the launch of the Renaissance program, students were very excited to know that they were being recognized for getting good grades, staying out of trouble and making it to school with great attendance. The students who did not receive a card for the first quarter would query why they did not recieve one, especially when they noticed their friends getting rewards. Students who were left out were provided with the requirements by the school news, newsletters and parent links by the telephone. An attractive facet about this incentive program is that it is done quarterly and students have multiple opportunities to receive a card throughout the school year. These opportunities mean that planning, implementation, execution and sustenance of the incentive program require

several hours and brainstorming. However, these programs are to help motivate students to aim for the highest standards in their life.

### **Previous Work**

Other schools around the country have found that incentive or rewards programs have a positive impact on the climate and culture of a school. Schools have incentives for different reasons and determine what the specific need or goal for their school is.

For instance, some schools have decided that discipline is main area of concern and have decided that incentive programs work; (Brown, 1998 and Brown, 2006), expressed that there are over 3,000 schools in the nation that participate in the Renaissance incentive program, providing students with movie tickets, activity passes, home work waiver and other rewards. Coaches at some schools use incentives to promote academics for students wanting to play sports (Peterson, 2007).

Another study determined that incentive programs provide benefits to schools. Students are now displaying strong interpersonal skills, higher self-esteem, better academic grades and lower rates of indiscipline. Other schools have asked businesses like Wal-Mart to help with incentives, for students that have great attendance records, “Epps, now a junior, turned things around. She became one of 2,800 students who will receive a \$25 gift certificate from Wal-Mart for achieving perfect attendance in September in the Cahokia School District - part of the district's new plan to get students in school and collect as many state tax dollars as it can” (Perez, 1999).

### **Collection of Student Narrative :**

The following questions were asked by the students at LSHS as it relates to the Renaissance incentive program: What important life lessons can you take away from the Renaissance program? What has Renaissance taught you about being a team player? What strengths are you learning about your self and areas of improvement that you have recognized with Renaissance? Student's responses where as followed: With Renaissance students expressed that the life lesson they have gained are that they are a family and should stick together, to be kind is more important than being right. Susan states, "Always make the best out of any situation," another student states, "everybody will not be pleased and that's ok." Morgan a student at LSHS states, "when working on a team cooperation and bringing ideas works great". Other students had similar answers expressing that Renaissance has taught them that it takes a team or a community to get things done, and listening, organizing, planning and learning to lead are important.

Students across the campus expresses that Renaissance has shown them that they can be anything they want and some strengths they have are being a leader, time management, making connections. Some weakness that students notice about themselves includes, learning to communicate, less controlling, and accepting that not everyone will like everything about you or what you do.

### **Results**

Incentives programs like Renaissance aim to provide a positive environment for students and faculty. It promotes leadership, school spirit and, boosts academic performance. The results at LSHS Renaissance illustrate the success of the incentive

because, goals that were set for three months at a time after each quarter were met and the strategic events that were planned were carried out. Parents and teachers encourage students so that they can earn the card every three months. Individual prizes and class prizes are a reminder to students hard work pays off. Students are now challenging themselves, and most importantly the climate of the school has changed from a negative one to positive.

However, the barriers to having incentive programs include, coming up with ideas and creating and sustaining new interest. Developing ideas that attracts both students and faculty can be challenging; it also takes a lot of time to plan rewards and activities. Identifying, funding also presents a challenge; especially for a school the size of LSHS. Nonetheless, the successes borne out of the Renaissance program has been a great boost of confidence and motivation, as an article states, “School officials and students tout rewards as good motivational tools (Zlatos, 2008).”

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to gain an understanding on whether or not incentive programs increase the motivation of students, faculty and staff at a LSHS. Data was collected with interviewing teachers and students at the institution. The study concluded that students and staff were impacted positively by the Renaissance incentive program at the high school. Students wrote essays showing the various ways that having an incentive program has made them become better individuals. Mason (1991), “Incentive programs can go a long way to boost morale and cut costs. But just as business evolves and changes, so too must incentive programs.” Overall, for students and faculty Lehigh Senior High, the Renaissance incentive program works, students and faculty seem to see

the purpose; expressing that when they are recognized for doing something they are more motivated to go above and beyond.

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